

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L LONDON 11044

DEFENSE FOR ISA

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: MPOL, UK, NATO

SUBJ: POSSIBLE UK DEFENSE CUTS

1. IN A PARLIAMENTARY SESSION ON 12 JULY ROY MASON, SECRETARY OF STATE FOR DEFENSE, ANGERED HIS PARTY'S LEFT-WINGERS BY STRONGLY AND FORCEFULLY CONDEMNING A LEFT-WING DEMAND THAT A FURTHER L,000 MILLION POUNDS BE SLICED OFF DEFENSE SPENDING NEXT FISCAL YEAR. MASON SAID THAT IF THE LATEST PROPOSAL OF A 1000 MILLION POUNDS CUT WERE TO BE IMPOSED "ON TOP OF THE CUTS WE HAVE ALREADY MADE". IT WOULD LEAD TO AT BEST A BRITISH DEFENSE "POLICY OF NEUTRALITY AND AT WORST, IT WOULD BE SURRENDER". RESPONDING TO WHAT THE PRESS DESCRIBES AS "ANGRY MUTTERINGS FROM THE TRIBUNITES", MASON CONTINUED BY NOTING (IN REPLY TO A LEFT-WING ASSERTION THAT THE AREA FOR PUBLIC EXPENDITURE CUTS MUST INCLUDE DEFENSE) THAT THE "DEFENSE BUDGET WILL...PLAY ITS PART IN ALLOWING THE REALLOCATION OF RESOURCES. SINCE WE TOOK OFFICE AND TO TH YEAR 1979-80 WE WILL HAVE CUT BACK PROJECTED DEFENSE EXPENDITURE BY 3200 MILLION POUNDS INVOLVING REAL AND

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NOT PHONEY CUTS".

2. IAN GILMOUR (CHIEF OPPOSITION SPOKESMAN ON DEFENSE) ASKED MASON TO ASSURE THE HOUSE "THAT WHEN FURTHER CUTS (IN PUBLIC EXPENDITURE) ARE ANNOUNCED, DEFENSE WILL BE EXCLUDED FROM THEM". MASON REPLIED BY SAYING THAT HE COULD NOT GIVE THE HOUSE "THE CATEGORICAL ASSURANCE" SOUGHT BY GILMOUR. "NO DOUBT", SAID MASON, "SOME CLAIMS WILL BE MADE WITHIN THE DEFENSE BUDGET. WHAT THEY WILL BE I KNOW NOT YET...(WE) WILL BE READY FOR THE CHANCELLOR'S CALL."

3. SEPARATELY, IN A SPEECH TO THE TORY REFORM GROUP ON 12 JULY, IAN GILMOUR ASSERTED THAT WHEN THE CONSERVATIVE PARTY RETURNS TO POWER, IT WILL STRENGTHEN BRITISH DEFENSES. ATTACKING STRONGLY WHAT GILMOUR TERMED "THE FIFTH COLUMN DECLARATION OF THE TRIBUNE GROUP", GILMOUR SAID IT WAS THE OPPOSITION'S DUTY "TO DO ALL IN OUR POWER TO STOP THE ROT". HE ARGUED FORCEFULLY THAT IT WOULD BE UNFORGIVABLE IF THE GOVERNMENT TRIED TO APPEASE THEIR LEFT-WING'S HOSTILITY TO FURTHER EXPENDITURE CUTS IN OTHER FIELDS "BY CUTTING DEFENSE YET AGAIN". GILMOUR QUOTED FIELD MARSHAL SIR MICHAEL CARVER (CDS) AS HAVING WARNED THAT BRITAIN'S DEFENSE FORCES ARE DOWN "TO ABSOLUTE BEDROCK" AND AS THE GOVERNMENT HAD ALREADY "CUT DEFENSE BY 6,262 MILLION IN THE PAST 18 MONTHS" IT WOULD BE UNFORGIVABLE TO CUT MORE.

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